Disclaimer: *This white paper results from a series of three meetings convened in 2005 with representatives of organizations with a specific interest in energy policy and development of clean power and organizations with a central interest in the conservation of New England's natural and recreational resources. All participants are actively involved in considering the potential benefits and environmental impacts of proposed wind development projects. While this paper is offered for consideration by New England's conservation community, it has not been officially endorsed by the participating organizations.*

NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATION COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES ON WIND POWER

Defining Common Principles on Wind Power Development and the Protection of New England's Natural Heritage

-- A position paper for consideration by New England's conservation community --

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INTRODUCTION

Wind power provides important public benefits, primarily because it is a renewable source of energy that does not emit greenhouse gases or other pollutants. In addition, wind power is an indigenous source of power, with concomitant advantages for the national economy and national security; wind power facilities also provide local economic benefits in the form of fuel price stability, employment, and tax revenue.

As a result of these benefits, interest in the development of new wind power generation facilities in New England has increased markedly, with several large-scale proposals under review and others in the formative stage. Interest is also being expressed in the development of smaller scale projects, including "community" wind projects and "disbursed" wind projects. The large-scale proposals, in particular, have highlighted the tension between the environmental benefits provided by utility-scale wind power projects and the potential for adverse impacts to important natural resource values associated with the project sites. Of the larger projects that have been proposed to date, one is offshore, most are on mountain ridgelines, and one involves agricultural lands, illustrating the variety of landscapes that may be affected by wind power development.

Depending on the site and the proposal, wind power has the potential to have significant impacts on important natural and recreational values. This is, of course, not unique to wind projects; most energy development projects and, in fact, most forms of land use modification have the potential to adversely affect natural resources and other environmental values. The particular resources most likely to be affected by wind power facilities include wildlife, scenic views, nature-based recreational opportunities including New England's long-distance trail systems, and wilderness.

The potential for conflict between the dual public values of increasing our use of renewable energy sources and protecting other environmental values is of serious concern to members of New England's conservation community. Recognizing this public policy dilemma, several New England conservation organizations convened a series of three meetings during the summer and fall of 2005 to discuss wind power development and natural resource protection. Participants included representatives of organizations with a specific interest in energy policy and development of clean power and organizations with a central interest in the conservation of New

England's natural and recreational resources. All participants are actively involved in considering the potential benefits and environmental impacts of proposed wind development projects. Participating organizations included:

- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Appalachian Trail Conference
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Maine Audubon
- Massachusetts Audubon
- Natural Resources Council of Maine
- The Nature Conservancy
- Union of Concerned Scientists

The purpose of the meetings was to determine if a consensus position among these organizations could be reached on how best to address wind power in the future, both in the public policy arena and in decision processes for siting specific projects. While the immediate focus was on defining a common conservation community position, the ultimate aim is to use this position as a foundation for formulating public policy.

Discussions culminated in a draft consensus position that involves three major principles aimed at ensuring development of additional sources of renewable energy while preserving New England's significant natural and recreational resources. The resulting position paper is being presented to decision-makers in each of the participating organizations for their consideration and potential endorsement. This paper is also being offered to other organizations within New England's conservation community with a stake in wind power development for their consideration. We encourage these organizations to review the paper and join in our efforts.

THE CONSENSUS POSITION

Participants in the wind power dialogue identified the following principles as the foundation for a policy that will facilitate wind power development and protect significant natural and recreational resources:

Principle 1. The portion of New England's electric energy supply coming from wind power should be significantly increased and made part of a comprehensive regional energy program.

Responsible development of renewable energy sources such as wind power can displace energy generated from fossil fuel sources and thereby reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere. This is essential to the environmental well being of the New England region and can make a meaningful contribution to mitigating air quality problems and addressing global climate change. Of the potential sources of renewable energy, wind is preferred as the primary source for the foreseeable future due to its relative cost effectiveness, technical feasibility, and environmental benefits.[1] To meet the statutory commitments of several states to reduce emissions and to effectively address regional air quality and global climate change, a significant increase in wind power generation within the New England region will be needed, certainly in the range of thousands of megawatts of new capacity.

While additional energy from wind could significantly benefit the region, the conservation community is concerned that continued growth in demand for electricity could undermine the potential benefits. Therefore, to ensure that increased use of wind power will result in significant

[1] While solar energy and other renewable sources show promise for the future, wind will likely be the major source of new renewable energy development in New England over the next ten to fifteen years.

long-term improvements in air quality, it must be accompanied by an aggressive energy conservation strategy aimed at stabilizing and eventually reducing overall energy demand in the region.

Principle 2. New England's significant natural resources and nature-based recreational resources must be protected, both for their inherent ecological value and for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

The conservation of New England's natural landscapes is critical to maintaining ecological processes, quality of life, and the regional economy, and over the years significant public and private investment has been directed toward this goal. In New England, many of the most productive sites for wind power facilities[2] are in areas that also have significant natural and recreational resource values. Responsive strategies for siting wind power facilities must account for and strive to protect important natural and recreational values, *especially those that are recognized as significant from a state, regional, or national perspective.*

Significant resources that could be affected by the development and operation of wind power facilities, and that should specifically be considered in the design of conservation strategies deployed in connection with wind power facility development, include: (1) critical ecological areas and communities, (2) habitats of particular importance to individual species or groups of species, (3) species of special concern, (4) bird and bat migration areas, (5) wilderness values, (6) outdoor recreation resources that depend on, and support, a high quality natural environment, and (7) scenic values and vistas.

Principle 3. Each New England state should create a coherent approach to wind power development by establishing siting policies and procedures that meet the dual objectives of tapping new renewable energy resources and protecting significant natural values.

Each New England state has its own set of laws and programs for both siting of energy facilities and conservation of significant natural values. As such, it would be impractical to expect all six New England states to use the same approach to site wind power facilities. There is, however, considerable merit in a collaborative approach aimed at meeting renewable energy needs and natural resource conservation needs that are multi-state or regional in scope. To facilitate a cohesive region-wide approach, each state should establish policies and procedures that:

1. Recognize the dual, high priority needs to develop substantially more wind power and to protect natural and nature-based recreational resources of state, regional, or national significance.

[2] Wind planners describe wind power potential using a 1-6 classification system based on average wind speed, with class 1 having the least average wind speed and class 6 the most. Today, areas in Classes 4-6 are typically thought to be the most economically feasible and productive. Class 3 areas are also considered to have potential for generation depending on the individual circumstances, and are likely to become more viable as the technology evolves. Class 3 sites typically provide much greater flexibility to reduce siting conflicts.

2. Seek to achieve balanced use of resources beyond the site-specific scale through landscape-level planning, promotion of siting proposals that respond to landscape-level plans, and design of landscape-level mitigation strategies.

3. Focus development in locations where the likelihood of conflicts with significant natural and nature-based recreational values is lower.

4. Recognize that there are some areas where any development – including wind power – should be avoided.

5. Explore different types and sizes of wind power facilities in diverse geographical settings, including terrestrial, coastal, and offshore areas.

6. Encourage placement of wind projects in more developed or ecologically disturbed areas, including urban areas, agricultural areas, and transportation and utility corridors.

7. Provide financial, regulatory, or other incentives for placement of wind power facilities in locations where impacts to significant natural and nature-based recreational values can be minimized.

8. Facilitate, guide, and accelerate wind power projects in the regulatory review process by reducing areas of conflict at the outset.

9. Collaborate with wind power developers, other stakeholders, and applicable federal agencies to create a more complete regional picture of bird and bat migration patterns and characteristics, the potential effects of wind development on these migratory species, and ways to resolve potential conflicts.

10. Encourage the collaboration and integration of federal, state, and regional wind power planning and regulation to foster a unified approach to securing considerably more energy from wind power while protecting significant natural and nature-based recreational resources.

While the focus here is on state and local efforts, the integral role of the federal government must be recognized. The federal government has the primary responsibility for siting of facilities on national forests and other federal lands and in offshore areas outside of state jurisdictional boundaries. Even within a given state's jurisdictional boundaries, federal agencies may be involved in regulating various aspects of project placement and operations; for instance, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has the responsibility to consider impacts on wildlife species under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act. Federal agencies involved with wind power regulation need to recognize the dual objectives of securing considerably more energy from wind power and protecting significant natural and recreational resources, and take actions that support these objectives.

CONCLUSION

New England's conservation community believes that state policies and regional collaboration based on the three principles articulated above can result in both a significant increase in the availability of new renewable energy and the long-term protection of the region's invaluable natural heritage. But this will not be possible without a strong collective regional vision and a high degree of collaboration – among stakeholders in each state, among the states, and among the

many organizations that make up New England's conservation community. Collaboration does not mean agreeing on the siting of every project, nor does it mean abandoning deeply held values. What it does mean is agreeing to core principles and working toward creative and beneficial solutions based on these principles. It means considering the whole regional landscape, not just an individual site, with an eye toward creating meaningful regional-level balance. It means recognizing that wind power is not just another form of development, but rather a source of energy that produces substantial benefits for the environment. And, finally, it means recognizing -- and protecting -- the natural values that make New England such a unique and wonderful place to live.

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